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# DISCOURSES OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND ADULT EDUCATION: BACK TO THE FUTURE?

## Introduction

Lifelong learning as a concept and field of practice is deeply contested territory when the main discursive thrust nowadays is narrowly economistic and instrumental (Field 2000; Formenti & West 2018). It is easily reduced to worklong training and the perpetual, even frenetic updating of knowledge and skills. This in an anxious labour market and globalised neo-liberal world wherepeople are frightened of being left behind. Emphasis is given to individuals' capacity to adjust to constantly changing technology, work and cultural environments. A mantra of adaptability drives the imperative: at the bottom line, people must invent, or perpetually reinvent themselves, as marketable products.

There is the tendency too of shifting responsibility for learning to individuals, to ensure employability while the modernisation of education has become pre-eminently a matter of servicing employer agendas. An older spirit of adult education for more humanistic, personal and social ends – as part of a struggle for human agency, well-being and a socially just, democratised world – is lost in policy pronouncements and provision (Tuckett 2017). Lifelong learning once had a more humanistic and social justice inspiration, while adult education was steeped in the idea of cultivating an active citizenry. We should mourn the loss of that inspiration which could once more be important in resisting the anti-educational cults ofracism, populism and nativism. An extreme form of nativist populism is on the rise in a country like Poland, in which otherness is demonised, and history, as in Poland's complicity in the Holocaust, is rewritten. Fascism is entering our contemporary theatre, too, stage right, fuelled by racism, xenophobia and the spectre of Islamic fundamentalism. In countries like Poland, Hungary, Italy, Russia, the United States and Turkey there is the reincarnation of an old allusion: of the strong man who willsort things out, deal with the other, the foreigner or migrant, and the messiness of otherness; sorting out people, in short, who think and act differently. This is deeply defensive, paranoid schizoid cultural territory.

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Representative democracy is in crisis too at such a time, in complex, multicultural societies. The case has to be made anewfor a reinvigorated humanistic lifelong learning and adult education to reinvigorate the public realm, in fractious societies (West 2016; Formenti & West 2018). I draw on historical research in a distressed, post-industrial city to make the case. Here fascist and racist forces alongside nativism have found strong purchase. I also use material from a new book written with Italian adult educator, Laura Formenti, exploring the importance of dialogue, within and without, in profounder forms of learning. Dialogue, we suggest, is fundamental to transformative experiencebut is often difficult to establish and sustain. We have drawn, among other authors, on distinguished Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's understanding of 'liquid modernity', so as to better understand the economic, political, cultural and educational turbulence and how we might best, dialogically, learn our way beyond it (Formenti & West 2018).

## A wider, more humanistic perspective

In the 1970s the discourse of lifelong learning, or what was then often called lifelong education, was as much social, cultural and humanistic as economistic in its scope (Dave 1976). John Field (2000), among others, has chronicled how various reports (for instance Faure's *Learning to Be,* published under the auspices of UNESCO) focused on the fulfilment of whole persons (often subsumed under the generic 'man'). There would be flexible organisation of different stages of education, through widening access to education at all levels, and a considered recognition of informal, non-formal as well as formal learning. In Europe, the European Commission produced various reports chronicling what it perceived to be the threats as well as opportunities of globalisation and the need for EU countries to pool sovereignty and resources to learn from each other in developing more inclusive systems of education and training. The concern was how to develop a European citizenship and ensure stronger social cohesion, alongside the usual economic anxieties (Field 2000). The concern has worsened.

## Fragile democracies

The problems of democracy are by now well documented: there is anxiety, in many quarters, about the health of representative democracies (Biesta 2011; Alexander 2014). There are various indicators of increased alienation, and cynicism, among people towards conventional politics(think Trump, Brexit and the Polish Law and Justice Party). This can be especially strong in marginalised, multi-cultural communities (Austed 2012, 2014; Freeman 2014). If widespread citizen distrust or disenchantment with formal

democratic institutions, local and national, is well chronicled in the United Kingdom so too are patterns of minimal engagement in voting, especially in local elections, in the districts where poor people live (Goodwin 2011).

Moreover, the most powerful in society get a great deal of support for their involvement in politics, using education and the corporate world, whilst those with least power get little or none (Alexander 2014). Alongside these trends is a decline of participation in a range of community and voluntary activities, especially in 'distressed' areas, struggling with high and persistent inter-generational unemployment, poverty, social fragmentation and an epidemic of mental dis-ease (West 2016). There is associated anxiety about young people's seeming disinterest and alienation from representative politics (West 2016). Some of the concern finds expression under labels like 'community cohesion', with the fear that young Muslim people, in specific communities in various European countries, are so alienated from the mainstream. There is also the frightening rise of hostility towards immigrants and peoples of difference, among elements of the white working class (Austed 2014). The rise of racism and xenophobia and new racist parties, and sometimes violent organisations like the English Defence League – with various equivalents in Continental Europe – is well chronicled (Goodwin 2011).

Political apathy, in some perspectives, is a consequence of growing social and moral deviancy and of the decline of the family as a socialising and civilising institution (Peterson 2011). In response to which, in countries like the United Kingdom, programmes of civic and or character education in schools, are seen to provide solutions in the face of anti-social behaviour, political apathy and the 'threat' of multi-culturalism, (Peterson 2011). The United Kingdom's community cohesion narrative tends to focus on an absence of common values, and the importance of inculcating 'British' values in schools, given a perceived absence of good character traits or of satisfactory socialisation for the young. For some educators, this evokes a belief that religious education, for instance, and building a Christian ethos, will help fill a moral vacuum in society (Arthur et al. 2010). Strengthening a Christian Europe has echoes in other countries like Poland and Hungary.

Gert Biesta (2011) considers the problem of thinking about the education of citizens stems from a socialisation concept of civic learning in which learning is the vehicle by which children become part of an existing socio-political order. He offers an alternative concept of 'subjectification', which is to do with learning from and in, not about, experience. Here the challenge is to create spaces in which dialogue and respectfulness are encouraged and learnt experimentally, with the right to challenge authority. The socialisation/moral character view of education is about learning as preparation for the future, of something that is to happen, rather than building understanding in the here and now, as in that older world of adult or popular education (Formenti & West

2018). Learning from, rather than about, experience is also a crucial psychoanalytic insight when thinking about really significant or transformative learning, (rather than the 'banking' concept of education in which empty heads are to be filled with established wisdom). Biddy Youell (2006) suggests the difference is between amassing lots of information about a subject, in ways that lack any genuine emotional commitment to what is being studied; or learning from experience, where there can be a relatively strong emotional attachment, because of the meaningfulness of the experience in the present. This, historically, was the domain and strength of adult education (West 2016). I suggest, on the basis of my own research, that the health of states and parliaments in multi-cultural societies depends in fact on the vitality of democratic life in diverse public spaces, not least in forms of adult education, beyond the reach of the market and even, to an extent, in regulatory terms, the state (Honneth 2007, pp. 218-219; West 2016).

## Bauman's liquid modernity

There has been no more eloquent interrogator of our contemporary state, and its implications for lifelong learning and education, than the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000). He died in 2017 after a long and inspiring academic career. Laura Formenti and I explored his contribution in a recent book (Formenti & West 2018). We reflected on the implications of his ideas for the basic formation of cohesive selves and our understanding of the role and purpose of transformative adult education. Formation, we suggested, has been considered a fundamental aim of education over millennia. From Plato's *paideia* and other philosophical schools in Ancient Greece; to the German concept of *Bildung,* in the eighteenth century, and the French/Italian *formation*. Here, the making of citizens entails building self-knowledge, as well as the cultivation of the arts, humanities and sciences as the means to enlightenment and civilisation. *Bildun*g focused on the life enhancing qualities of interpretation, understanding and gaining knowledge; a kind of edification of the self by the self (Laros, Fuhr & Taylor 2017). But for Bauman, 'liquid modernity' means that individuals face acute uncertainty and even under-determination. Teaching and learning as well as education become short-term, instrumentalised and superficial, focused on precarious jobs in transient labour markets.

The trouble is that formation, or the capacity for self-edification, require sufficient degrees of stability and certainty – in relationships, families, education, work and wider social interaction, while meaningful forms of learning and education take time to mature and need to draw on inherited and worthwhile knowledge, tested in experiential fire. Today, the consensus as to what is worthwhile or valuable has unravelled and we are asked to choose from a bewildering cafe menu of what Bauman calls junk food. Can

we learn a fulsome humanity and the spirit of democracy in such conditions? (Bauman 2005b). If stability is constitutive of human life and education, we might be in trouble. Both knowledge and the self are contested in shifting terrain. Bauman suggests that the hard-fought struggle for edification is sacrificed on the altar of immediacy, economic relevance and false material gods.

He argues that profound economic, social and cultural change has undermined overly linear, ordered, rational expectations about learning, education and self-formation. The exponential growth of knowledge, for instance, transcends the individual's capacity to assimilate it (we could of course argue that this was always true, for the majority, who were denied access to higher learning). Nowadays the divide between a minority with relatively good access to knowledge, of a substantial and imaginative kind, and those instructed in the skills of flexibility and adaptation to the marketplace, is widening. Many people enter 'a landscape of ignorance, where it is easy to feel lost' (Bauman 2005a, p. 25).

This is a neo-liberal world where historic determinants of class, gender or cultural identity have loosened as have the class solidarities that made meaningful change, or self-formation, possible. The workers' or popular education movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are a good example. Undoubtedly, more people now have access to information, travel, languages, courses and digital technology. But, paradoxically, it might increase disorientation and uncertainty, and compel us towards increasingly unconfident choices. If there are many more opportunities for marginalised groups, these are fragile, even for university graduates. Jobs are precarious, labour is casualised while the power and wealth of the few increases. Competitive and individualistic survival is the new mantra. We are, in Bauman's terms, all hunters now in search of the latest kill or stimulation.

Bauman offers, at least in part, a deeply pessimistic reading of the present in which contingency combines with growing inequality to narrow meaningful educational, occupational and even relational opportunities for the majority. We may conspire in our freneticism, seduced by an endless quest to change, driven by the fantasy of the new and the fear of being left behind in a despised underclass. The constant marketing of 'transformative education' might itself be one example of manipulative forces. Institutions proclaim they transform lives, but the reality might be disillusionment and frustration. Bauman himself was once a member of the Polish Communist Party but became disillusioned with its conformist ideology. He was influenced by writers like Gramsci and his concept of hegemony, to suggest political and educational ways forward. The state, in this view, uses cultural institutions and ideology to maintain power rather than violence, economic force or coercion. Hegemonic culture propagates values and norms that seem like common sense and thus maintain the status quo (Formenti & West

2018). Adult education was once imagined as a counter-hegemonic movement to disrupt the tyranny of common sense through critical and reflexive dialogue (West 2016).

Bauman's perspective on liquid modernity remains troubling – the idea that social forms and human relationships melt away faster than new ones are forged while the seductions and manipulations of consumerism, including in new, digital forms of surveillance capitalism strengthen (Zuboff 2018). Becoming an agentic self is problematic because some stability in our relationships with actual people and in the symbolic world is essential to biological, psychological and social flourishing. Notions of life authorship and meaningful, self-generated transformation risk being cut adrift in a kind of cultural and economic tsunami. Even worse, to repeat, we may be responsible for creating some of the formlessness and drift ourselves: in the restless search for the new, fashionable and stimulating (Formenti & West 2018).

We also suffer from the dominance of *homo economicus* in which our humanity is reduced to a metaphor of rational, highly individualistic, self-aggrandising, calculating machines. But we become profoundly disillusioned by such reductionism, and lives can be bereft of meaning. We may be excited by perpetual adaptation but vulnerable to the forces of globalisation, neo-liberalism, unregulated labour markets and digital manipulation. Policy makers claim the necessity of lifelong learning, but this is short-term and instrumental. Doctrines of employee responsibility, flexibility and frequent job changes create the new, numerous and expanding precariat, encompassing many middle-class people as well the old working class.

Bauman insists that the contemporary world is characterised less by opportunity and more by uncertainty and the privatisation of ambivalence (Bauman 2000; Bauman & Raud 2015). It is a kind of chaotic continuation of modernity where a person shifts from one social position to another in a fluid manner. Nomadism – read by Bauman with concern – is a general trait of the 'liquid modern' person, as s/he flows through life like a tourist, changing places, jobs, spouses, values and without traditional networks of support and cultural embeddedness. Bauman (2005a&b) goes into considerable detail and examines the implications for 'education' and 'formation'.

First, social structures are not given time to solidify, meaning that the fulfilment of any life project becomes illusory. Work is a prime example in processes of casualisation or the GIG economy in parts of the 'developed' world; and mass migration to cities, and fragile, exploitative and even dangerous employment in the 'developing' one. The relationships of solidarity and possibilities for collective action via workers' organisations are weak in the face of the power of globalized capital.

Second, politics and power have become divorced from each other. 'Power now circulates within the politically uncontrolled global space' (Bauman 2005a, p. 303). Political processes once linked individual and public concerns with engendering col-

lective action and resolution, but these processes have weakened, with politicians appearing like marionettes, dancing to the globalised rhythms of elites and powerful corporations. Political institutions, like the old Emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's tale, are revealed as naked and false but only for those with the courage or innocence to name them. Market forces enter the stage, often in capricious ways, as global capital seeks higher rewards and lower labour costs, everywhere.

Third, there is a withdrawal of 'communal insurance' as welfare states and social solidarities fracture and risk is privatised. A premium is placed on competitive orientation, degrading collaboration and teamwork in the process. Fourth, and connectedly, there is a collapse of longer term thinking and planning; and of the social (and educational) structures in which thinking, planning and action can be inscribed. The demise of workers' education in the United Kingdom, and other 'developed' and 'democratic' countries, may be thought of in such terms.

Fifth, the future is deemed out of control in a movement from hope to apprehension. Apprehension and uncertainty bring fear: that our jobs will disappear in the play of the speculator's algorithm, or that our individual educational efforts bring little by way of a secure future. There is only impermanence and the perpetual mantra of lifelong learning as a kind of salvation, uttered with a sort of medieval religious fervour to diverse members of the new international precariat.

Sixth, the burden for dealing with the flotsam and jetsam of our lives is individualised. We must change ourselves and loyalties as and when necessary, almost regardless of the circumstances or consequence for our lives. The idea of risk and insurance against it being collectivised is fragile in the weakening of welfare states: even though we all experience times of intense vulnerability and need. The only people to be rescued by the collectivityseem to be the bankers, where profit is privatised and losses socialised, because they are deemed too big to fail.

Bauman plays with other metaphors in his interrogation of our 'posture towards the world' – of gamekeepers, gardeners or hunters. These are embodied states. In the pre-modern period, the gamekeeper operated within a social ethic of things being best when not interfered with, that the world was 'a divine chain of being and has its rightful and useful place' (Bauman 2005a, p. 306). The preservation of 'natural' balance was the rule. In the earlier modern period, the metaphor of the gardener applied where the world must be ordered and controlled by attention, effort and nurture. The gardener 'knows best' in this metaphor. We work out what is best for the plots of our lives, or livelihoods, with solutions lying in our own heads. But we can perceive this to be ideological hubris and excluding: the gardener defines who are the 'weeds' to be uprooted and destroyed; there is no 'natural' or 'divine' order, humankind brings its own order to the garden. The weeds may be the other, those who do not fit the humanly

prescribed order of things: like, historically, the Jew, and now the refugee, or those on the economic margins, decried as feckless, work-shy, failures and n'er-do-wells and even dangerous (West 2017; Formenti & West 2018).

In liquid modernity, Bauman argues, we are hunters, pursuing short term objectives, in loneliness, while the overall balance of things is ignored. The hunter is vaguely aware of unsustainability, but this is pushed to a distant future in the pursuit of immediate gratification. Here is a world of fierce competition; the cultures of the gamekeeper and gardener have been disparaged and deregulated in a war of each against the other. Such metaphors are powerful in contemporary discourse: they fuel our imagination and attract or repel us, evoking our own epistemology, our ongoing 'formation'. They entail different understandings of the place and nature of education. It is why building dialogue, and creating new public space for it, might be important in the struggle against hegemonic forces; sharing our metaphors, interrogating them, and finding new ones that resonate with who we are and want to be, individually and collectively, can be a revelation of our deepest values, emotions, ideas, differences and human commonalities (Formenti & West 2018).

Progress and knowledge, however, once the pillars of solid modernity, have weakened and even imply danger and potential disaster. What matters is survival and living for the moment rather than a lifetime's improvement: transformation, of any meaningful kind, dissipates under the gaze of immediate pressure. We can, as stated, be terrified of exclusion because of our incapacity to learn quickly and consume essential life-style choices. We risk, to repeat, entering an underclass of losers. This is the territory of dystopia, of the consumer-orientated, ideological cultivation of discontent. Upward mobility has ossified in countries like Britain, the United States and Italy as the threat of moving downwards increases. Bauman (2005a) himself observes, using findings from the US, that 74% of students attending the most prestigious colleges come from the top-income quarter of society but only 3% from the bottom. In a growing number of countries, the education system has turned into a mechanism for the reproduction of privilege and deprivation (Bauman 2012). The lot of the losers, the poor and marginalised, might include the occasional riot or rebellion but often degenerates into drug addiction or incarceration (Formenti & West 2018).

Moreover, the consumerist fantasy of becoming someone else has replaced the idea of salvation or redemption. We once accused God when things went wrong (and many still do) but now have only ourselves to blame in our perpetual desire to be someone else, perhaps a celebrity in whom we invest our desire and longing, despite the vacuousness of the project. We can, we are told, become what we want but are then blamed or blame ourselves for failure. Further, consumerism does not appear to have made people any happier, or better. In fact, narcissism, or self-worship, is a new

if fragile god because we face an infinity of choices without necessarily trusting any. Changing our image and dress and other wrappings is the 'utopia' of the hunters. The search for new appearance becomes seductive, but there is never an end to the pursuit, only impermanence, fleeting satisfaction, and, perhaps, the occasional bliss of a kill.

Lifelong learning could, as implied, be fuelled by a discourse of the hunter, in search of a quick fix, a new job, a changed lifestyle or set of relationships. Educators, teachers, coaches, counsellors, like ourselves, are pressured to buy into the new dystopia or 'halbbildung'/half education in Adorno's (Adorno et al. 1972) terms. This is a state of adaptation, and collusion with, rather than challenge to, hegemonic discourse. The ancient heteronomy of the Church is replaced by that of the market, with acceptance of the world as a given, where there is no alternative (Gaitanidis 2012). The market has invaded the academy as students demand easily assimilated products, especially when paying high fees for the privilege, even if the outcome is one of dissatisfaction. Bauman (2005a) reminds us of the importance of time in which to create and experiment, using well-tested recipes, in contrast to quickly digestedfast food. We can feel empty, dissatisfied and even poisoned by the 'fruits' ofagri-industry. Education, in Bauman's view, has become like fast food offering a quick stimulus that quickly dissipates (Formenti & West 2018).

Bauman (2012) himself stresses the imperative of active citizenship and dialogue to challenge hegemony and to enhance the possibility of reciprocal understanding, co-existence and collaboration with the other. Reviewing Bauman's work, Scott McLemee (2012) suggests that things of permanence – friendships, relationships, good literature and aspects of the humanities – can remain of abiding value. Research on the micro and meso-level reveals strong, as well as weak, bonds. Laura Formenti has observed, in studying the family, that a longing for safe havens, an encompassing, caring network of relationships is stronger than ever, and people continue to struggle towards this rather than giving up (Formenti 2011b). My own research illuminates how non-traditional learners in universities, from the margins of society, find resources of hope in ideas, literature, people and relationships that enable them to exploit some of the possibilities of the liquid world, in courageous ways (West 1996; Finnegan, Merrill & Thunburg 2014). I suggest, in the face of neo-liberalism and the crises of multiculturalism, it is worth re-visiting the historical nuances of popular or liberal adult education to chart a different future path.

## Back to the future

Adult education, historically and discursively, sought to create a society of shared meanings and active citizenship. In the work of R.H. Tawney, for instance and his ideas of an

inclusive fraternity. Or in the case of Raymond Williams who believed that a central purpose of adult education was to create an inclusive culture of shared meanings in which all might participate in equal ways. Both stressed the importance of a full and liberal education for everyone in which there could be negotiation of diverse meanings and a search to build common values by which we could live together in greater solidarity. Each, like Bauman, was concerned with how we learn democratic sensibilities, fraternity and commonality. Both can help us think, with Bauman, about our present crises in a globalising, precarious world. Tawney, the ethical Socialist, and Williams, the humanistic Marxist have more in common, in fact, around these themes, when rescued from the condescension of certain kinds of reductive Marxist analysis (West 2017).

I should make clear that a common culture is not one incorporating the other into a firmly established, unquestionable set of values while leaving them free to engage with quaint customs. Nor is a common culture one in which everyone believes the same things, but where everyone has equal status and equal opportunities for shaping ways of life in common. This, I suggest, will only thrive if public space is created where deeper and inclusive dialogue is possible, contrasting, for instance, with the solipsistic emoting of social media. Multiculturalism has occasionally suffered from a politically correct avoidance of anything that could give offence, preventing people from questioning what might get in the way of collective well-being. We cannot simply accept the domestication of women, for instance, in any culture, or the Holocaust denier, but ways are needed to ensure that dialogue and relationships, if at all possible,can continue, even in tension ridden, diabolical situations.

## Tawney's idea of fraternity

Lawrence Goldman (2013) has argued that we should look to the early Tawney and his work in adult education, and the idea of fraternity, as a guide in our present malaise. Tawney saw adult education as the vehicle to build microcosms of the Kingdom on Earth, according to his Christian socialist ideals. In hindsight, his later more Fabian, statist socialism, of elites handing down prescriptions and solutions from on high, appears less attractive. We should remember that workers' education in the UK was uniquely an alliance between progressives in universities and workers' organisations. It was characterised by a mix of Enlightenment idealism, the aspirations of democratic socialism and, for many, a religious belief in the potential divinity in everyone. It was as much a democratic and spiritual as well an educational movement that played a key role in creating British social democracy after the Second World War.

Workers' education represented a social experiment open to the marginalised, with equality of status between students encouraging freedom of expression and enquiry,

tolerance and respect, and the capacities to manage the turbulence arising from the clash of ideas. Dispute did not, in general, degenerate into breakdown. At their best the classes were communities of imaginative, caring, committed and thoughtful students in which all were teachers as well as learners. Revisiting the history offers glimpses into how previous generations of working-class people learned inclusive democracy and the making of shared meanings. It might teach us about relevant educational processes and principles for our present discontent.

Workers education, in the form of tutorial classes, once thrived in the city where I was born, Stoke, in the English Midlands, the subject of my recent work (West 2016, 2017). The first ever university/workers' tutorial class met there in 1908 when 30 or so worker students gathered on Friday evenings, for 2 hours, over a period of years, with their tutor, R.H. Tawney, an establishment figure but with a firm belief in popular, dialogic forms of education. The classes were free from prescribed curricula and members were encouraged to explore issues in their working lives from the perspectives of history, politics, economics and literature. Fortnightly essays were required, and the standard of some of these was high (West 1972; Goldman 1995). There were no formal examinations or qualifications due to a desire to eliminate competition and vocationalism from the classroom (West 1972; Rose 2010).

The students were potters, miners, clerks, shop assistants and elementary school teachers, women and men (West 1972). Many were from non-conformist backgrounds, from families, in short, that encouraged them to think for themselves and challenge hegemonic ideas. The Marxist Social Democratic Federation made up the nucleus of the first class. The Social Democratic Federation was formed in 1883 under the leadership of Henry Hyndman who was the son of a businessman and became a journalist and political agitator (Macintyre 1980). The Federation was opposed to the British Liberal Party of the time, and its programme was progressive, calling for a 48-hour working week, the abolition of child labour, compulsory free secular education, equality for women and the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Some SDF members held an extremely 'mechanical version of the materialist conception of history' in which the whole of human life 'was controlled by economic forces independent of human volition' (Macintyre 1980, p. 17). Education, politics and consciousness were epiphenomena of the techniques and relations of production. The students could sometimes be rigid in their economic doctrines (Macintyre 1980), that played out in tutorial classes. But we can also observe Tawney's own efforts, and those of some students, to keep dialogue and enquiry alive (West 2017).

The Workers Educational Association (WEA), through which the classes were organised, was founded on three principles. First, opposition to revolutionary violence. Second, no institution, however perfect in conception, could work effectively

with individuals whose morality was inadequate. Third, where a sound morality was lacking, this could be forged in a community of scholars seeking truth and the common good (Dennis & Halsey 1988). There was an Aristotelian ideal at work, as well as Oxford idealism (Goldman 1995): of the fully developed person living in communities, building and sustaining virtue, in relationship – communities cultivating not self- but other-regardedness (Dennis & Halsey 1988). The Oxford idealists influencing Tawney were opposed to individualism, utilitarianism and social atomism and drew on German philosophers, especially Kant and Hegel, to insist that individuals best realise their potential in the collective. People were a part of webs of social, cultural, political as well as economic relationships from which they could not be divorced for analytic purposes.

However, as noted, Tawney was well aware (Goldman 1995, p. 160) of how the same spirit of non-conformity drove some worker students to narrow viewpoints and the tendency to over-proselytise. Dogmatism and even fundamentalism of a Marxist or religious kind existed in the classes. But most students admired tutors like Tawney who remained steadfast as well as respectful even when harangued by a fundamentalist. Leftist fundamentalists, sometimes from the Social Democratic Federation and later the Communist Party, though not exclusively so, would quote texts like *Das Capital* with religious fervour. One recalled a particular Marxist – the SDF could dominate the first tutorial classes – challenging Tawney point by point and citing classic Marxist scripture. Tawney took it in his stride but insisted that there were other points of view. The student accused the tutor of hopping around like a bird, from twig to twig, and a sense of bad temper pervaded the room. But Tawney insisted that everyone, including his challenger, take tea together afterwards and tell stories, read poetry and sing songs. A shared humanity and a spirit of fraternity were restored (Rose 2010, p. 266). And the class stayed together despite the local secretary of the SDF demanding that his members leave for fear of ideological contamination (Goldman 2013; West 2016, 2017).

Tawney's contribution to theorising the role and practice of inclusive adult education is being positively re-evaluated by various scholars (Holford 2015; Goldman 2013; West 2016, 2017). The tutorial classes sought to make university education available to everyone, in their own localities: different to today's meritocratic assumptions about higher education for individual social mobility. Tawney was committed to a liberal and humane view of education for everyone so that they could acquire civic qualities of reciprocity, mutual recognition as well as intellectual confidence. Communities should not be privileged or discounted because of wealth or poverty. Tawney also represents a more constructivist view of knowledge: the classes were classes, not lectures, and ideas were explored and developed in discussion. The processes of education were democratised – students engaged in research and discovery through using original source material, like historical documents, rather than simply relying on secondary

texts. The fundamental aim was to make university education available to all in their localities, in pedagogically democratic and fraternal ways. And in a revised reading of my own earlier historical analysis, there is ample evidence of the extent to which the spirit of the tutorial classes motivated a wider workers' educational movement across the mining communities of North Staffordshire (West 1972, 2016).

Notwithstanding, some still regard Tawney and the tutorial classes as being complicit in marginalising other forms of working-class popular knowledge, especially Marxism (Macintyre 1980, pp. 89-90). In one influential historical reading, the tutorial classes and the WEA were 'welcomed by the establishment as a bulwark against revolution-ism, a moderating influence and a form of social control…' (Fieldhouse 1995, p. 123). The difficulty is that there is little evidence from Stoke or many other places that the tutorial classes encouraged political quiescence in Marxist students, in fact quite the contrary. Historian Jonathan Rose (2010) questions whether quiescence applies even among Fieldhouse's own sample of seventy-one students.

We are now better ableto form a more nuanced, psychosocial understanding of the importance of the classes and processes of self/other recognition in the stories the students tell (combining interpretations from psychoanalysis and critical theory, the work of Freud, Winnicott and critical theorist Axel Honneth) (West 2016, 2017; Formenti & West 2018). The students learned, like countless adult students, then and since, something of a democratic and fraternal sensibility, which they describe in their own words (West 1996; Rose 2010, pp. 274-275). We can better understand how human flourishing in workers' education, and beyond, required sufficient experience of what Honneth (2007, 2009) calls self/other recognition: of love and experience of self-affirmation, at intimate, group and cultural levels. This included recognition from significant others, like Tawney and more experienced students. And then, feelingfully recognised and appreciated in groups, like the tutorial classes. When we feel sufficiently recognised and even important to a group's democratic life, we are better able to recognise others, from which stronger social solidarities can flow. I have applied and developed these ideas in interpreting the history of workers' education and contemporary popular education, to encompass symbolic and unconscious dynamics, creating cultures of fraternity, shared meaning and civic activism among for instance white and Muslim working-class women in health education projects (West 2016).

## Williams, common cultures, common meanings

Raymond Williams was of the same broad tradition as Tawney, although of a later generation and with a somewhat different political outlook. His ideas are in fact closer to Bauman's. Williams understood that the WEA's historic mission was far from over

by the 1950s. If 'exceptional minds' from diverse backgrounds now could go to university, wrote Williams in a letter to WEA tutors, the remaining question was what about everyone else? Were they simply to be treated as rejects, suitable only for narrow vocational training? The WEA stood for something that even educational reformers forgot, obsessed as they might be with schooling: 'It stands for an educated democracy, not for a newly mobile and more varied élite', Williams wrote in 1961 (cited in Goldman 1995, p. 252). Like Tawney, Williams was critical of those who presumed to deliver answers to ordinary people using ideological texts to shape their minds and actions, without requiring active and critical engagement. Such 'teaching', the banking concept, was the antithesis of a democratic education, as Williams, like Tawney, understood it: it was demeaning, infantilising and anti-educational to proffer conclusions – people needed to reach them on their own, in fellowship, over time.

In his writing on 'culture as ordinary' (Williams 1989), Williams observed how elites of whatever kind – whether advertising men and women, (we could add the whizz kids of Silicon Valley) or the authoritarian left – hold dehumanised, reductive views of the masses. Expensively educated people were 'now in the service of the most brazen money-grabbing exploitation of the inexperience of ordinary people' (Williams 1989, p. 6). 'The new cheapjack is in offices with contemporary *décor*, using scraps of linguistics, psychology and sociology to influence what he thinks of as the mass mind' (Williams 1989, p. 7). But his scorn also applied to those Marxist interpretations of culture and education which insisted that people should think in prescribed ways. 'It is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings (within cultures) can in any way be prescribed: they are made by living people, made and remade, in ways that we cannot know in advance'. The Marxist interpretation of culture, he argued, could never be acceptable if it retained such a directive element. There are echoes here of Bauman's work.

Williams, like Tawney, was critical too of militaristic metaphors and the fetish of violent 'solutions' among some on the left. When power is monopolised by unresponsive elites, divisions can constantly open among those who seek to oppose them: some may find violence attractive, whether of the left, racist right or Islamic fundamentalism. Metaphors of assaulting citadels, Williams observed, are the wrong kind of metaphor. Any struggle needed to be slow, democratic, non-violent and fundamentally educational. 'Active reception', Williams suggested, was a living response that real communication elicited, in adult education, as in life, which depended on creating 'a community of experience, of human and intellectual equality'. Adult education was 'a crucial experience', a central way of getting in touch with ourselves and others in new ways (McIlroy 1993, p. 6).

## Multi-culturalism, learning dialogue or avoidance?

These ideas about adult education might seem passé, but in the face of liquid modernity and the crises of our times they could help to re-assert the relevance of a renewed, inclusive, civic, critical and fraternal adult *education* (West 2016). Adult education more so than learning, because it implies collective activity in strugglesagainst 'common sense' and for dialogue across differences. Terry Eagleton (2009) notes here how multiculturalism, at its least impressive, blandly embraces difference without wanting to examine too closely what we might differ about. It is in such terms anti-educational. At an extreme, it avoids challenging Holocaust deniers or the troubling treatment of women in all communities. There is a facile pluralism that numbs the impetus to contest other people's views. Eagleton wants to see vigorous opposition to those who peddle destructive views and challenges the idea of respecting beliefs just because they are beliefs. There were differences and disputes in workers' education – and cultural differences of class and gender – but ways could be found of dealing with and transcending them. Tawney, for one, and many students, managed this rather well. The point of this paper has been to revisit some of this spirit and its pedagogy, values and motivation as a guide in our present perplexity. Discursively, we must re-assert the value of the public realm and of good enough inclusive space for people to learn how to dialogue one with another and challenge oppressive norms (West 2016).

I want to conclude with a story (West 2016). In 2013, a mosque in York, England, was threatened by a demonstration and violence by the racist English Defence League (EDL). The elders were troubled but wanted to avoid knee-jerk responses. They decided to invite the leaders to take tea with them, to share concerns and discuss differences. Mohamed El-Gomati (2013), one of the elders, wrote, 'Tea, like many things we think of as English is adopted from other cultures.' He reminds us that George Bernard Shaw thought 'that if the world's problems were brought to the prophet Muhammad, he would solve them over a cup of tea'. El-Gomati wrote: 'When we listened to each other we realised the EDL thought we supported extremist behaviour and the Taliban.' In the storytelling that day people began to understand, however provisionally, what they held in common: a humanity and some of the uniqueness and hybridity of actual people. Even the EDL's racism is recognisably human and can – with difficulty – be challenged in a spirit of fraternity, through actual engagement with our own human complexity and that of the other. Tawney, like the Prophet, encouraged his students to take tea, after his classes, to tell stories and sing songs, and thought this essential to building fraternity and conviviality across difference. Of course, this is not to deny the importance of non-violent struggle against oppressive, hegemonic ideology, as in the climate extension rebellion. Nonetheless, there remains a need for some antidote

to feelings of precariousness, isolation and fear of the other, alongside the anxieties of economic and culture fracture. This, I suggest, lies in a collective effort to reinvigorate the public realm, in which liberal, dialogical adult education has a central role.

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**DISCOURSES OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND ADULT EDUCATION: BACK TO THE FUTURE?**

SUMMARY: Ours is a troubled, liquid and precarious world. Tsunamis of economic change, neo-liberal ideology and the cult of individualism have led to the rise of extreme nationalist, nativist and fascist organisations, where intolerance is shown to the other, the migrant, or asylum seeker. It is a time where dialogue across difference seems hard to achieve, while new social media often serve as echo chambers in which people only listen to others like themselves. Moreover, representative democracy is in crisis, while lifelong learning has been instrumentalised and commodified with its labour market focus. Popular or citizenship education has long been in decline. Drawing on the work of distinguished Polish sociologist Bauman, and of adult educators R.H. Tawney and Raymond Williams, alongside new psychosocial interpretations of the history and contemporary world of adult education, the case is made for a reinvigoration of the public realm, in which the marginalised spirit of a dialogical, popular adult education can claim a central role.

KEYWORDS: liquid modernity, the extreme right, ideology, lifelong learning, adult education, public space, dialogue.

**DYSKURSY UCZENIA SIĘ PRZEZ CAŁE ŻYCIE I EDUKACJI DOROSŁYCH: POWRÓT DO PRZYSZŁOŚCI?**

STRESZCZENIE: Nasz świat jest skomplikowany, płynny i niepewny. Tsunami zmian ekonomicznych, ideologia neoliberalna i kult indywidualizmu doprowadziły do powstania ekstremalnych organizacji nacjonalistycznych, natywistycznych i faszystowskich, gdzie nietolerancja jest okazywana obcym, migrantom lub osobom ubiegającym się o azyl. Jest to czas, w którym dialog między różniącymi się stronami wydaje się trudny do osiągnięcia, podczas gdy nowe media społecznościowe często służą jako komnaty echa, w których ludzie tylko słuchają opinii podobnych do własnych. Co więcej, demokracja przedstawicielska znajduje się w kryzysie, podczas gdy uczenie się przez całe życie jest instrumentalizowane i utowarowione z powodu nadmiernej koncentracji na potrzebach rynku pracy. Edukacja ludowa (popularna) lub obywatelska jest od dawna w odwrocie. Opierając się na pracach wybitnego polskiego socjologa i filozofa Zygmunta Baumana i andragogów R.H. Tawneya i Raymonda Williamsa, wraz z nowymi psychospołecznymi interpretacjami historii i współczesnego świata edukacji dorosłych, podjęto próbę ożywienia sfery publicznej, w której marginalizowany dotąd duch dialogicznej i powszechnej edukacji dorosłych może odgrywać centralną rolę.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: płynna nowoczesność, skrajna prawica, ideologia, uczenie się przez całe życie, edukacja dorosłych, przestrzeń publiczna, dialog.